

LITTLE SIOUX SHINES AFTER WEEKLONG RIVER CLEANUP

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CHEROKEE - The last of roughly 200 volunteers went home muddy, tired and proud this weekend as the third annual Project AWARE (A Watershed Awareness River Expedition) came to a close on the Little Sioux River. The weeklong canoe trip and river cleanup held its closing ceremony on June 25 at Spring Lake Park, in Cherokee.

Volunteers pulled a record 124 cubic-yards of trash from the Little Sioux River this year - enough to fill more than 23 ten-wheel dump trucks. Participants pulled out televisions, an erector set, roughly 50 tires, a lawnmower, a hubcap, three tons of scrap metal and much more. They collected objects sufficient to furnish a house, equip a farm, entertain a party and build a car. Only 600 pounds of the collected garbage could not be recycled.

A spokesperson for the governor offered congratulations at Saturday's closing event. In addition, artist David Williamson - who helped volunteers construct a sculpture from garbage collected last year - spoke about this year's proposed artwork. Volunteers at the Iowa State Fair and Clay County Fair will help Williamson turn much of the collected scrap metal into sculpture.

"I thought it went great this year," said Project AWARE creator, Brian Soenen. "It's an honor to be able to work with the volunteers and have them participate in a project like this."

As in past years, the 2005 edition of Project AWARE invited volunteers to spend as little as a day or as long as a week paddling the river, camping, collecting garbage and learning about natural resources. The program tackled the Little Sioux River this year between Milford, Iowa and Cherokee from June 18 to 25.

"It's a lot of fun," said participant Don Propst of Des Moines. "The people are amazing. When you can get people to take a vacation just to pick up trash, that's something."

Organized by two programs within the Iowa Department of Natural Resources - the IOWATER citizen water quality monitoring program and the Keepers of the Land volunteer program - Project AWARE invites volunteers to make a stand for water quality. Project AWARE participants "make a difference, one stretch of river, one piece of trash at a time."